

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 15: “Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II, including: Roma/Sinti; Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.”, 11 October 2006

Presentation by Dr. Jens Modvig, Deputy Head of Mission, OSCE Mission in Kosovo:

Honourable Delegates,
Distinguished Participants,
Mr. Chairman,

One year ago, ODIHR co-hosted an “*International Implementation Conference on Roma, Sinti, Travellers*”.

At this conference, I announced that the OSCE Mission in Kosovo “[...] *has included in its 2006 programme the facilitation of, and support for, the development by the Kosovo Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of a comprehensive Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Strategy for Kosovo*”.

Kosovo is the only entity of the former Yugoslavia and the wider region that has not yet developed a strategy for the improvement of the situation neither of its Roma population, nor of its Ashkali and Egyptian population. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo believes that such a strategy is necessary and does not depend on the future status of Kosovo.

Most of you will be aware that in Kosovo, there are Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. These three groups are the most vulnerable and

disadvantaged in Kosovo. They face similar problems in many areas. Therefore, a Kosovo Government Strategy should include all three groups.

Today, I have the pleasure and honour to announce that the Government of Kosovo has committed itself to develop, together with the representatives of the communities concerned, a “Kosovo Government Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.”

In February and March of this year, our Mission carried out a first feasibility assessment. The Mission enlisted the support of an external consultant and met with the political and civil society representatives of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, members of Kosovo’s government, and representatives of the international organisations.

The initiative was welcomed by all sides.

Following this assessment, the OSCE Mission found a strong partner in the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, the Kosovo Branch of the Open Society Institute. The Kosovo Foundation for Open Society is the link to the Decade for Roma Inclusion in which nine countries of South-Eastern Europe participate. This partnership seeks to ensure that the Decade for Roma inclusion and the Kosovo Government Strategy mutually complete each other.

All relevant international stakeholders have been informed about the initiative. This allowed us to guarantee the continuous support for the strategy development.

Five weeks ago, the Kosovo Prime Minister, the OSCE Mission and the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society hosted the launching “*Conference for the*

Development of a Kosovo Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians". Almost 100 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian civil society representatives and 50 representatives of the international community, including ODIHR, participated in this conference.

At this conference, all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representatives as well as the international community representatives renewed their support for the development of a joint government strategy for all three communities and emphasized that the participation and full commitment of civil society and the public authorities in Kosovo at central and local level was of key importance.

It was also concluded that the process is open for and needs the participation and support of international organisations and non-governmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe, UNDP, UNHCHR, UNHCR, and UNMiK as well as Kosovo and international NGOs.

Moreover, the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo sought a guarantee from the Kosovo Government that the strategy will not only be developed, but that visible and tangible efforts will be made for its subsequent implementation.

As for the strategy's development, our Mission is currently facilitating roundtables in Kosovo's different regions with the aim to identify the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian members for a number of thematic working groups.

The working groups will cover issues such as education, health, employment and economic empowerment, registration and civil documents, housing – including informal settlements – and – probably the most challenging – return of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian IDPs and refugees. These working groups will be co-chaired by the Kosovo Government and international organisations or international NGOs.

Concluding the efforts of these working groups over the next months, the final draft of the strategy will, we hope, be supported by a convention of Kosovo's Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians as well as by the Kosovo Assembly and Government. The whole process will last – if no major obstacles occur – about a year. The next challenge, its implementation, will take much longer.

Both, the strategy development and its implementation can only be successful, if the three communities, Kosovo's institutions, the international community and NGOs continue to work closely together.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that we are consulting and exchanging information on a regular basis not only with the political leadership, but also with the Kosovo Roma and Ashkali Forum. Comprising around 40 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian NGOs in Kosovo, this umbrella organisation is the most legitimate civil society representation.

I would like to conclude by mentioning that the support by ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and the Council of Europe, among others, has been crucial in reaching the above-mentioned conclusions.

Thank you very much for your attention.